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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 0600
21 March 1965

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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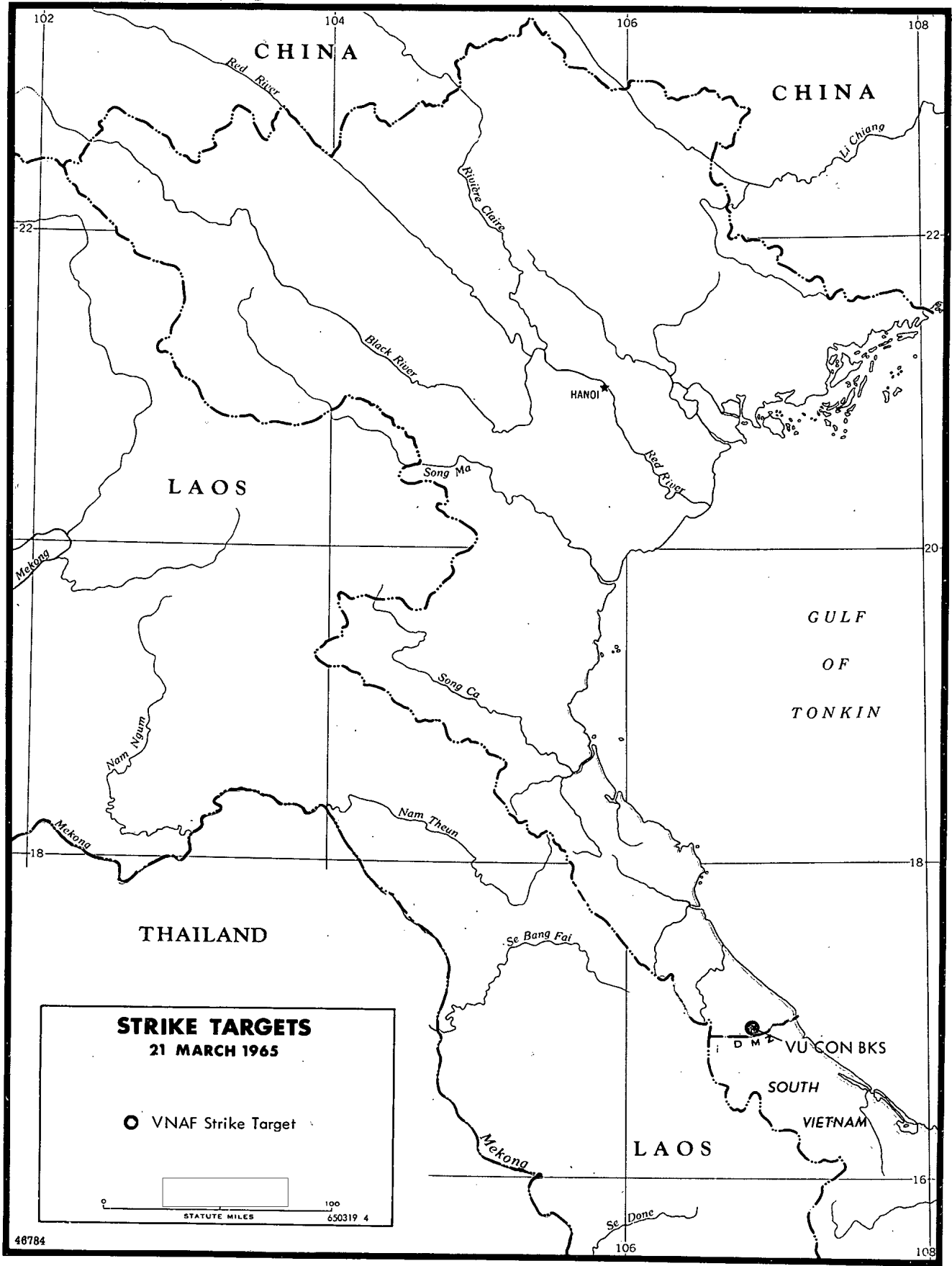
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NORTH VIETNAM

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
21 March 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Vietnam as of 0600 EST

The South Vietnamese Air Strike of 21 March

1. South Vietnamese aircraft struck the North Vietnamese Vu Con barracks just north of the Demilitarized Zone at about 1500 local Vietnam time (0200 EST). The target area is a strongpoint one mile north of the DMZ and is suspected of serving as a staging area for infiltration into South Vietnam. The target is comprised of two major areas about half a mile apart. The north area has 38 buildings, the south some 26.

2. Initial US and Vietnamese pilot debriefings indicate that the target area suffered sixty per cent damage. Pilots reported no ground fire over the target. No post-strike photoreconnaissance is yet available.

3. Some 24 VNAF Skyraider aircraft were in the strike force; twelve US aircraft flew flak suppression, rescue and reconnaissance support for the strike. All US and VNAF aircraft recovered safely.



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Bloc Military Developments

5. No significant military deployments associated with the Vietnam situation have been noted



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[REDACTED]

in North Vietnam, Communist China or the Soviet Union during the past twenty-four hours.

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Bloc Political Developments

7. Hanoi is attempting to exploit the 16 March attack on a South Vietnamese school building by South Vietnamese aircraft in an effort to whip up popular indignation against the US. A North Vietnamese radio commentary on 19 March laid the blame for this incident, in which a number of children were killed, at the doorstep of the US and "its lackeys." The broadcast reeled off a list of alleged "atrocities" committed by the US and South Vietnamese armed forces and concluded by asserting that the South Vietnamese people will "surely step up the struggle and deal fiercer blows at the enemy" in order to avenge the school incident.

8. Peiping, thus far, has not commented on the 19 March air strike. It has, however, replayed some of the North Vietnamese propaganda on the school bombing in South Vietnam.

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South Vietnam Political Developments

15. The Armed Forces Council, meeting on 20 March reaffirmed General Tran Van Minh as armed forces commander-in-chief, and named General Huynh Van Cao, chief of the political warfare directorate, as chief of the Joint General Staff. Either Chief of State Suu or Premier Quat is expected to announce these decisions shortly. Threatened fireworks, centering about opposition to General Minh, did not materialize at the Council meeting, apparently due to the moderating influence of air force commander General Ky. However, as in the past, contentious issues may merely have been deferred to some later date.

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[REDACTED]

16. There is also some concern that the Buddhists may object to the fact that the top three military posts are now held by Catholics: Minh, Cao, and Defense Minister General Nguyen Van Thieu. General Ky was delegated by the Council to discuss matters with the Buddhist leadership and to point out that the appointments were made solely on the basis of military qualifications.

Viet Cong Military Activity

17. Further evidence of Viet Cong determination to continue direct actions against US personnel was revealed on 20 March. Two Viet Cong terrorists, seized in Saigon, admitted plans to bomb a US billet near the airfield. The terrorists had about ten pounds of explosives hidden under the fender of their motor scooter.

18. [REDACTED] the Viet Cong continue to concentrate on small-scale actions including minings, kidnappings and mortar shelling of government outposts.

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